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INITIATION AND "PASSIVITY"

We have often noted, among those who claim to set themselves up as adversaries of esoterism, a regrettable tendency to confuse it with its counterfeits, and, consequently, to include within the same attacks things that are in reality the most different, even the most opposed. Here again, there is evidently an example of modern incomprehension; ignorance of everything that touches the esoteric and initiatic domain is so complete and so widespread in our time that one cannot be astonished at anything in this regard, and this can be an excuse, in many cases, for those who act in this way; nevertheless, we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether this is truly a sufficient explanation for one who wishes to go more deeply into things. First of all, it goes without saying that this incomprehension and this ignorance themselves fall within the "plan" for the destruction of every traditional idea that has been pursued throughout the entire modern period, and that, consequently, they can only be willed and maintained by the "influences" that are working toward this destruction; but, beyond this general consideration, it seems that there is still, in what we are alluding to, something that responds to a more precise and more clearly defined design. Indeed, when one sees initiation deliberately confused with "pseudo-initiation" and even with "counter-initiation," with everything mixed together in so inextricable a manner that no one can any longer recognize himself in it, it is truly very difficult not to ask oneself who or what profits from all these confusions.

Naturally, it is not a question of good or bad faith that we wish to raise here; moreover, it would have only a very secondary importance, for the harmfulness of the false ideas that are thus spread is neither increased nor diminished by it; and it is quite possible that the very bias shown by some is due solely to the fact that they obey unconsciously some

suggestion. What must be concluded from this is that the enemies of initiatic tradition do not make dupes only among those whom they draw into the organizations that they "control" directly or indirectly, and that even those who believe they are combating them are sometimes, in fact, instruments just as useful, although in another way, for the ends they propose. It is doubly advantageous for "counter-initiation," when it cannot succeed in completely dissimulating its procedures and its aims, to have both attributed to true initiation, since thereby it incontestably harms the latter, and, at the same time, diverts the danger that threatens itself by misleading minds that might find themselves on the path of certain discoveries.

These reflections occurred to us once again on the occasion of a book published recently in England by a former member of certain organizations of a particularly suspect character; we mean organizations that are "pseudo-initiatic" and among those in which the mark of an influence of "counter-initiation" is most clearly distinguished. Although he has left them and has even openly turned against them, he nevertheless remains strongly affected by the teaching he received there, and this is especially visible in the conception he forms of initiation. This conception is strange enough to merit being noted more particularly; it serves as the guiding idea of what purports to be a history of initiatic organizations, or so-called such, from antiquity to our days, a history eminently fanciful, where everything is confused in the manner we mentioned earlier, and which relies on multiple heterogeneous quotations, most of which are borrowed from very doubtful "sources"; but that is not what interests us at present, any more than what is simply in conformity with certain "conventional" theses that are found almost invariably in all works of this kind. We prefer to limit ourselves, for this is what is most "instructive," to showing the errors implied in the guiding idea itself, errors that the author manifestly owes to his former affiliations, so that, in sum, he does nothing but contribute to spreading and accrediting the views of those whom he believes he has become the adversary of, and he continues to take for initiation what they presented to him as such, but which is really only one of the paths that can serve to prepare agents or instruments for "counter-initiation."

Naturally, everything in question is confined within a certain purely psychic domain and, by that very fact, can have no relation with true initiation, which is, on the contrary, of an essentially spiritual order; there is much talk of "magic" in it, and, as we have already said often, magical operations of whatever kind do not in any way constitute an initiatic process. On the other hand, we find this singular belief that every initiation must rest on the awakening and ascent of Kundalinī, whereas this is in fact only a method proper to certain very particular initiatic forms; moreover, it is not the first time that we have observed, in what we would readily call anti-initiatic legends, a sort of obsession with Kundalinī, the reasons for which do not appear very clearly. Here, the matter is fairly closely linked to a certain interpretation of the symbolism of the serpent, taken in an exclusively "malefic" sense; the author seems not to have the slightest idea of the double signification of certain symbols; but this is a point to which we propose to return shortly. Be that as it may, Kundalinī-Yoga is assuredly something quite other than magic; but what is abusively envisaged under this name, in the case that concerns us, may well be nothing but that; if it were only a question of "pseudo-initiation," it would doubtless be even less than that, a purely "psychological" illusion; but if "counter-initiation" intervenes to some degree, there can very well be a real deviation, resulting in a taking of contact, not with a transcendent principle or with the higher states of being, but quite simply with the "astral light," or rather we would say with the world of "wandering influences." The author, who accepts the expression "astral light," designates this result under the name of "illumination," which thus becomes curiously equivocal: instead of applying to the acquisition of a higher knowledge, as it should normally if taken in a legitimate initiatic sense, it refers only to phenomena of "clairvoyance" or to other "powers" of the same category, "powers" moreover especially negative, since it appears that they ultimately serve to render the one afflicted by them accessible to suggestions emanating from unknown "Masters," who, in the present case, are nothing but sinister "black magicians."

We readily admit the accuracy of such a description for certain auxiliary

organizations of "counter-initiation," which indeed seeks in general only to make of its members simple unconscious instruments that it may use at will; we ask ourselves only, since this point is not perfectly clear, what precise role the so-called "initiate" plays in the magical operations that must bring about such a result, and it seems quite clear that this can be, at bottom, only the wholly passive role of a "subject." But what we contest in the most absolute manner is that this same result has anything whatsoever in common with initiation, which on the contrary excludes all passivity; we have already explained, on other occasions, that this is one of the reasons why it is incompatible with mysticism; all the more so is it incompatible with what implies a passivity of an incomparably lower order than that of mystics, and which in sum falls within what has been customary, since the invention of spiritism, to designate under the vulgar name of "mediumship." Perhaps even, let us say in passing, what is in question here is fairly comparable to what was the real origin of this "mediumship" and of spiritism itself; and, on the other hand, when "clairvoyance" is obtained through certain psychic "trainings," even if Kundalinī has nothing to do with it, it commonly has the effect of rendering the being eminently "suggestible," as is proved by the constant conformity of his visions with the special theories of the school to which he belongs; it is therefore not difficult to understand all the advantage that true "black magicians," that is to say representatives of "counter-initiation," can draw from this. It is no more difficult to realize that all this goes directly against the very aim of initiation, which is properly to "deliver" the being from all contingencies, and not at all to impose upon him new bonds that add themselves to those that naturally condition the existence of the ordinary man; the initiate is not a "subject," he is even exactly the contrary; every tendency toward passivity can only be an obstacle to initiation, and where it is decidedly predominant, it constitutes an irremediable "disqualification."

We know well that one may object to this that certain initiatic paths involve a more or less complete submission to a guru; but this objection is in no way valid, first because it is a question of a submission freely consented to, not of a subjection imposed without the disciple's knowledge, secondly because the guru is always perfectly known to the

latter, who is in a real and direct relationship with him, and that he is not an unknown personage manifesting himself "in the astral," that is to say, all phantasmagoria aside, acting through a sort of "telepathic" influence. Moreover, this submission has only the character of a simple "pedagogical" means, one might say, of a wholly transitory necessity; not only will a true spiritual instructor never abuse it, but he will use it only to render the disciple capable of freeing himself from it as soon as possible, for, if there is an invariable affirmation in such cases, it is that the true guru is purely interior, that he is none other than the "Self" of the being himself. Initiation must lead to the consciousness of this "Self," which is obviously not the fact of children under tutelage nor of psychic automatons; the initiatic "chain" is not made to bind the being, but on the contrary to provide him with a support allowing him to rise indefinitely and to surpass his own limitations. Even when it is a question of contingent applications that may secondarily coexist with the essential aim, an initiatic organization has no use for passive and blind instruments, whose normal place could in any case only be in the profane world, since every "qualification" is lacking to them; what it must find among its members, at all degrees and in all functions, is a conscious and voluntary collaboration, implying all the effective understanding of which each is capable; and no true hierarchy can be realized or maintained on any other basis than that.

A HIEROGLYPH OF THE POLE

At the end of our remarks on the Tetraktys, we made an allusion to the cubic "stone with a point," reserving for ourselves a return to certain considerations relating to it. This figure, in ancient documents, is completed, in a rather unexpected manner, by the addition of an axe that seems to be placed in equilibrium on the very summit of the pyramid. This particularity has often intrigued specialists in Masonic symbolism, most of whom have been unable to give any satisfactory explanation of it; however, it has been suggested that the axe might well be here nothing other than the hieroglyph of the Hebrew letter qoph, and it is indeed there that the true solution lies; but the correspondences that must be made in this regard are still much more significant if one considers the corresponding Arabic letter qāf, and it has seemed interesting to us to give an outline of them, despite the character of strangeness that these things risk taking on in the eyes of the Western reader, who is necessarily not accustomed to this kind of consideration.

The most general meaning attached to the letter in question, whether in Hebrew or in Arabic, is that of "force" or "power" (in Arabic qowah), which may moreover, according to the cases, be of a material order or of a spiritual order (1); and it is indeed to this meaning that the symbolism of a weapon such as the axe corresponds in the most immediate manner. In the case that presently concerns us, it is obviously a spiritual power that must be in question; this results from the fact that the axe is put into direct relation, not with the cube, but with the pyramid; and one may recall here what we have already explained on other occasions concerning the equivalence of the axe with the vajra, which is also, before all else, the sign of spiritual power. There is more: the axe is placed, not at just any point, but, as we have said, at the summit of the pyramid, a summit that is often considered as representing that of a spiritual or initiatic hierarchy; this position therefore seems to indicate the highest spiritual power in action in the world, that is to say what all traditions designate as the "Pole"; here again, we shall recall the "axial" character of symbolic weapons in general and of the axe in particular,

which is manifestly in perfect accord with such an interpretation.

Now what is very remarkable is that the very name of the letter qāf is also, in the Arabic tradition, that of the sacred or polar Mountain[1]; the pyramid, which is essentially an image of it, thus bears, by this letter or by the axe that replaces it, its own designation as such, as if to leave no doubt as to the meaning that it is appropriate to recognize for it traditionally. Moreover, if the symbol of the mountain or of the pyramid is related to the Axis of the World, its summit, where this letter is placed, identifies more particularly with the Pole itself; now qāf is numerically equivalent to maqām[2], which designates this point as the "Place" par excellence, that is to say the unique point that remains fixed and invariable in all the revolutions of the world.

The letter qāf is, in addition, the first of the Arabic name of the Pole, Qutb, and, by this title as well, it can serve to designate it in abbreviated form, according to a procedure whose use is very frequent[3]; but there are still other concordances no less striking. Thus the seat (the Arabic word is markaz, which properly signifies "center") of the supreme Pole (called al-Qutb al-Ghawth, to distinguish it from the seven Aqtāb or secondary and subordinate Poles)[4] is described symbolically as situated between heaven and earth, at a point that is exactly above the Ka'bah, which precisely has the form of a cube and is also one of the representations of the Center of the World. One may therefore envisage the pyramid, invisible because it is of a purely spiritual nature, as rising above this cube, which is visible because it relates to the elementary

1 Some wish to identify the mountain Qaf with the Caucasus (qafqasiyah). If this assimilation had to be taken literally in the current geographical sense, it would certainly be erroneous, for it would not accord in any way with what is said of the sacred Mountain, which can be reached 'neither by land nor by sea' (la bil-barr wa la bil-bahr). But it must be noted that this name Caucasus was applied long ago to several mountains situated in very different regions, which suggests that originally it may really have been one of the designations of the sacred Mountain, of which the other Caucases would then be so many secondary 'localisations'.

2 Qaf = 100 + 1 + 80 = 181; maqam = 40 + 100 + 1 +40 = 181. In Hebrew the same numerical equivalence is found between qoph and maqom. These words, furthermore, do not differ from the corresponding Arabic words except by the substitution of vau for alif, of which there are numerous other examples (nar and nür, 'alam and olam, etc.); the total is then 186.

3 It is thus that the letter mim, for example, may serve to designate the Mahdi. Muhyi d-Din. ibn al-Arabi sometimes gives it this meaning.

4 The seven Aqtab correspond to the 'seven lands' which are also mentioned in other traditions; and these seven terrestrial Poles are a reflection of the seven celestial Poles which preside respectively over the seven planetary Heavens.

world marked by the quaternary number; and, at the same time, this cube, upon which thus rests the base of the pyramid, or of the hierarchy of which it is the figure and of which the Qutb occupies the summit, is also, by its form, a symbol of perfect stability.

The supreme Qutb is assisted by the two Imāms of the right and of the left, and the ternary thus formed is again represented, in the pyramid, by the triangular form that is that of each of its faces. On the other hand, the unity and the binary that constitute this ternary correspond to the letters alif and bā', according to their respective numerical values. The letter alif presents the form of a vertical axis; its upper point and the two extremities in horizontal opposition of the letter bā' form, according to a schema whose equivalents could be found in various symbols belonging to other traditions, the three angles of the initiatic triangle, which indeed must be considered properly as one of the "signatures" of the Pole.

Let us add further, on this last point, that the letter alif is very especially considered as "polar" (qutbāniyyah); its name and the word Qutb are numerically equivalent: alif = 1 + 30 + 80 = 111; Qutb = 100 + 9 + 2 = 111. This number thus represents unity expressed in the three worlds, which is perfectly suited to characterize the very function of the Pole.

These remarks could doubtless have been developed further, but we think we have said enough for even those who are most foreign to the traditional science of letters and numbers to have to recognize at least that it would be very difficult to pretend to see in all this only a simple set of "coincidences"!